

South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes, February 22, 2018
Rembert Dennis Building
Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Titus Duren, Bobby Garmany, Stan Halliday, Stephen Thomas, Martha Herbert, Jonathan Rabon

MEMBERS PRESENT VIA CONFERENCE CALL:

Sam Hiott

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Vice Chair Cleve Smith

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Sam Chappelle, Shelley Ivester, Achi Treptow, Billy Dukes, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Michael Hook, Michael Small

OTHERS PRESENT:

Paul Taylor

Sam Hiott was connected via conference call and Chair Hutchins opened the meeting.

The minutes of the October 12, 2017 meeting were not approved as submitted. Committee member Stephen Thomas had a question about a statement Chris Page, Aquatic Nuisance Species Manager, made regarding using Triploid grass carp in Lake Murray to control native vegetation and would like clarification before approval of the minutes. Emily Cope is to contact Chris Page.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS:

Constituent Paul Taylor inquired about the status of the installation of the flap gates at the Broad River waterfowl area. Emily Cope and Billy Dukes confirmed that the flap gates have been ordered, but DNR was awaiting a schedule from the contractor.

TOUR OF SAMWORTH:

Chair Hutchins reported at the request of Committee member Titus Duren, the following individuals took a 3-hour tour of Samworth WMA: Deputy Director Emily Cope, Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes, himself, and Mr. Duren. Chair Hutchins stated he could not take every committee member along since he would have had to call a meeting and have a quorum present. He further stated he was pleased to report a great job was being done. The point taken away from the visit was that a lot is being done, but there is still a lot to be done. Progress will be checked every 45 days.

UPPER COASTAL WATERFOWL PROJECT VIDEO PRESENTATION:

Achi Treptow, Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project Leader, presented a video of the upper coastal waterfowl projects currently underway, incorporating the use of a drone. The properties in the videos were Santee Coastal, Santee Delta and Samworth Wildlife Management Areas. Combined, the three properties represent 26,000 acres.

WATERFOWL HARVEST REPORT:

Mr. Dukes distributed the Waterfowl Harvest Reports for Category 1 Waterfowl areas for adult and youth units (copy attached to the original minutes). The harvest numbers for 2017-2018 were consistent with last years' numbers. For adult hunts, the total harvest was 2582, the total number of hunters was 786, for a return of 303 ducks per hunter. The top hunt units were Bear Island, Cedar Island, Murphy Island and the Santee Delta areas. For youth hunts, the calculation formula was incorrect. The formula has been corrected (copy attached to the original minutes) and the data will be posted on the DNR web site. For youth hunts, the total harvest was 323, the total number of hunters was 144 for the return of 2.2 ducks per hunter. Bonneau Ferry was the top hunt unit.

2018-2019 MIGRATORY BIRD SEASON RECOMMENDATIONS:

Mr. Dukes presented the 2018-2019 Migratory Bird Season Recommendations Action Item. He distributed hand-outs (copy attached to the original minutes) with the Federal and Staff Recommendations for the 2018-2019 Migratory Bird Season. Changes to this years' seasons would be a 60-day duck season, 59 days with 1 youth day, and the pintail bag limit would change from 1 per day to 2 per day. Committee member Stephen Thomas suggested a Non-Coincidental Opener (copy attached to the original minutes) for Teal Season to avoid alligator and shrimping season opening days coinciding with it. Chair Hutchins asked for the opinion of the Committee members regarding the opening day. Based on the recommendations of all Committee members, a motion was made by Stephen Thomas to accept staff recommendations for the 2018-2019 Migratory Bird Season, with the change to amend the teal season opening date to September 14, running to September 29. The motion was seconded and passed. This recommendation will be taken to the DNR Board for their consideration.

POTENTIAL CHANGES TO LOWER SALUDA RIVER TROUT REGULATIONS:

Ross Self, Chief of Fisheries, introduced Assistant Chief of Fisheries Lynn Quattro to explain the Potential Changes to Lower Saluda River Trout Regulations. Three hand-outs were distributed (copies attached to the original minutes). Trout Unlimited brought to DNR's attention that breeding of rainbow trout was happening in the lower Saluda River. The upper Saluda River has historically been more of a fish and release area, whereas the lower Saluda has been more of a fish and take area. The proposed catch and release area where the rainbow trout habitat has been discovered is 1.3 miles long, from I-26 to Stacy's Ledge. Access to this area of the Saluda River is difficult, but with the Riverwalk expanding, it will be more accessible in the future. Public opinion in meetings and on-line polls has been favorable.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Emily Cope gave the legislative update as follows: This is the second year of a 2-year session. The Conservation Bank is due to sunset this year, but there has been a push to revamp it. The House and Senate are working together to keep it alive. H4807- Several years ago the turkey season was restructured and the bag limit reduced to 3. DNR's research report is due this November to the General Assembly, but was scheduled to sunset at the same time the report was due. DNR asked for an extension on the sunset and the House has introduced a bill for a 2-year extension. The existing conditions will be kept and DNR will meet with the General Assembly November through January. The House and Senate have a bill looking at youth hunting tags. It would remove the tagging requirements on the youth hunt days, providing them more opportunity. Another issue was that 16 and 17 year olds can hunt on private land at any time during the season without an adult, but on youth day they are required to have an adult present. Age and hunter education requirements are in consideration, as well as the adult having to possess a hunting license. Updates to come.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Chair Hutchins requested a report to see how many people participated in the free hunt days. He has asked the South Carolina Wildlife magazine to put together a special spread featuring the Governor's Cup Billfishing Series since this is the 30th anniversary of the tournament. Hopefully, the special feature can be included in the October 2018 issue of the magazine.

Committee members voiced their appreciation and thanks to Chair Hutchins for visiting Samworth and praised DNR for providing great waterfowl lottery hunts.

Titus Duren asked how the deer tagging program fared in its first year and Emily Cope responded that it fared well for its first year. Ms. Cope thanked our biologists, IT department and licensing division for all working together to smooth out any problems the agency encountered.

Stephen Thomas agreed the deer tagging system went well. He questioned the date of the next Aquatic Plant Management meeting and when the new draft plan would be in place. Ms. Cope was not sure about the draft plan, but agreed to keep Mr. Thomas up-to-date. Mr. Thomas remarked that Mr. Derrell Shipes, now retired, would send him yearly draw hunt statistics and asked if he could still receive them. Billy Dukes agreed to gather the draw hunt statistics and send them to him. Mr. Thomas praised SCDNR's continuing efforts at Samworth WMA.

Sam Hiott was impressed with the Agency's use of drones and hopes we can continue to use them to keep up-to-date on our properties. Mr. Hiott expressed his concern over trout due to the recent cold weather and was informed that the agency has encouraged the public to catch and release trout.

There was no old or new business.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be held on May 15, 2018. Location to be announced.